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## Karbala in the Umayyad Mosque

Sunnite Panic at the “Shiitization” of Syria in the 2000s

*Thomas Pierret*

On an afternoon of April 2008, about a hundred people were attending a lesson in Sunnite theology at the Umayyad Mosque of Damascus. Suddenly, lamentations were heard that almost drowned out the voice of the teacher. The lamentations were emanating from a group of Iranian pilgrims gathered around a man singing the martyrdom of Imam Hussein at the battle of Karbala. Visibly upset by this vocal interference, the Sunnite scholar asked his audience to repeat after him a sentence from the book he was explaining. He reiterated his request several times and invited the students to raise their voices. The audience progressively went along with the game, so that the “chorus” eventually resonated throughout the immense prayer hall.<sup>1</sup>

This struggle for the soundscape of Damascus’ most sacred mosque illustrates the tensions that have arisen as a result of increasingly visible Shiite religious activities in Syria during the last three decades, and more particularly during the past five years.<sup>2</sup> In the midst of the 2000s, indeed, the former homeland of the Umayyads—the most glorious dynasty of Sunnite history, but a faction of usurpers in the eyes of the Shiites—has been seen by many as the target of a wide-scale plan of “Shiitization” (*tashayyuʿ*) mas-

terminated by Iran. According to this narrative, the Islamic Republic has taken advantage of its strategic alliance with the Alawite-dominated regime of Damascus to spread the Imami creed in Syria. The same narrative asserts that although such activities started under Hafiz al-Asad, their growth was facilitated after 2000 by the even more pronounced pro-Shiite bias of his son Bashar.<sup>3</sup>

These claims must be handled with the greatest caution, since the theory of a “Shiite Crescent” has been chiefly promoted by sides like pro-Western Arab regimes, the Syrian opposition, and anti-Syrian Lebanese parties, which have aimed to neutralize the popular appeal of the anti-Israeli/anti-US stance of the Syrian-Iranian axis. Yet, one cannot rebuff the aforementioned narrative without further ado: whereas in Palestine, for instance, similar rumours are obviously groundless,<sup>4</sup> in Syria, there are Twelver religious institutions that enjoy substantial financial means and a growing margin of action. The Shiitization narrative thus relies on a complex intertwining of facts and propaganda that this chapter aims to unravel.

The first part of this chapter is devoted to the growing visibility of the Shiite presence in Syria during the twentieth century. The second part deals with the evolution of Sunnite-Shiite relations in the country from the end of the Ottoman Empire to the 1990s. Finally, in the third part of the chapter, an analysis is provided of the panic surrounding Shiitization that took hold of Syrian Sunnis during the 2000s.

### *Background: the growing visibility of Twelver Shiites in twentieth century Syria*

During the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and particularly since the 1980s, Syria has witnessed a marked development of Shiite presence and activities on its soil. This situation is the result of four main processes: the revival of the small local Imami community, rapprochement between the Alawite sect and Ja‘fari doctrines, the settlement of Iraqi refugees, and the establishment of a strategic alliance between Damascus and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Shiite communities have lived in various parts of Syria for centuries. According to the last census that included figures on the country’s sectarian composition, which dates back to 1953, Shiites represented only 0.4 per cent of the total population at that time.<sup>5</sup> Until the early twentieth century, moreover, they had no scholarly tradition, and hence a very limited visibil-

ity in the local religious landscape. The awakening of the Damascene community was initiated by Ayatollah Muhsin al-Amin, a reformist cleric from Jabal 'Amil (now South Lebanon) who settled in the city in 1901.<sup>6</sup> On his arrival, al-Amin sought financial support from local Twelver merchant families in order to set up a school and the very first private Islamic charity in Syria. These institutions, which were later named after their founder (al-Muhsiniyya), still exist today and remain under the control of Shi'ite notable families. The Ayatollah's role in the modern history of the Damascene Imami community was so significant that the latter's stronghold in the Old City is now known as "the quarter of al-Amin". The sheikh's fame far exceeded the limits of the Levant, not only because he was a *marja'*, that is, one of the most respected Shi'ite scholars of his time, but also because he took part in journal-mediated controversies with such prominent figures as the Egyptian Sunni reformist Rashîd Ridâ. Since al-Amin's death in 1952, no religious leader of such a calibre has emerged among his Syrian coreligionists. However, the institutions set up by the Ayatollah have continued to thrive during the following decades thanks to the rapprochement between Twelver Islam and the Alawite minority, which has dominated the state apparatus for more than four decades now.

Although the Alawite creed has its roots in the Shi'ite tradition, as shown by its veneration of Imam Ali, it has long been considered heretical by both Sunni and Imami scholars. Rapprochement (*taqrîb*) with Shi'ite clerics from Lebanon and Iraq only developed from the early 1910s onwards due to three factors.<sup>7</sup> First, a reformist trend emerged within the community that aimed to rationalize the Alawite faith by drawing from the—incomparably more elaborated—Twelver scholarly tradition. Second, separate religious courts for the Alawis were established in 1922 by the French authorities, and the reformists pushed for the adoption of Ja'fari law in place of customary rules. Third, the leaders of the community who advocated the creation of an independent Alawite state within the coastal region were marginalized in the late 1930s at the hand of their pro-Syrian unity nationalist rivals, who sought to get closer to the Islamic mainstream by stressing their Shi'ite identity.

Rapprochement deepened from the late 1940s onwards due to the fact that Iraqi and Lebanese religious networks identified the Alawite mountains as a "mission field". In 1951, these networks helped Alawite scholars to set up the Ja'fari Society, whose name eloquently illustrated the agenda of the community's reformist trend. One of the first initiatives of the society was

to lobby for the official recognition of Ja'fari law by the Syrian state, which it obtained in 1952.

Following Hafiz al-Asad's coup in 1970, the process of rapprochement took a more distinctly political turn. As the first non-Sunnite head of state since independence, the Alawite General encouraged rapprochement with the Shiites as a way to stress his community's belonging to Islam. He therefore lent full support to those reformist Alawite men of religion who had promoted both "Ja'farization" and national unity since the 1930s. He also sought the support of prominent Shiite clerics. The first to provide such support was the Iraqi Hasan al-Shirazi, the brother of Ayatollah Muhammad al-Shirazi and main ideologue of the "Shiraziyya", a presently transnational movement that originated in Karbala.<sup>8</sup> Between his expulsion from Iraq in 1970 and his assassination in Beirut ten years later, Hasan al-Shirazi lived in Lebanon and Syria. In the latter country, the authorities enthusiastically welcomed him as an opponent to the rival Iraqi regime. Al-Shirazi reciprocated by stressing the Alawites' belonging to Shiite Islam in the foreword of a booklet published in 1972 by Alawite reformists. In the following years, the Iraqi cleric built on his ties with the latter to expend missionary efforts among their coreligionists. He reportedly encountered limited success because the level of religious observance among Alawites was—and is still—relatively low.<sup>9</sup>

The second answer to al-Asad's request came in 1973, when the religious and political leader of the Lebanese Twelver community Musa al-Sadr officially recognized the Alawites as Shiites. Through this move, al-Sadr won a powerful patron for his community: in the following decades, the latter's alliance with Syria—through al-Sadr's Amal movement and later Hizbullah—would constitute a permanent feature of regional politics.

After 1979, al-Asad's strategic partnership with revolutionary Iran earned him the support of what had now replaced Najaf as the centre of gravity of Shiite Islam. Of course, this would not make the Alawites more credible "Muslims" in the eyes of many Syrian Sunnis, who were facing harsh repression as a result of the 1979–82 Islamic uprising. Nevertheless, the Syrian-Iranian alliance had a major consequence, that is, the unprecedented development of Shiite institutions within Syria.

Syria is home to several shrines that occupy a prominent position in the symbolic geography of Imami Islam. The most important of them are located in Damascus (tombs of Sayyida Zaynab, the daughter of Imam Ali, and of Sayyida Ruqqaya, the daughter of Imam Hussein, "Head of Hussein"

in the Umayyad Mosque) as well as in Aleppo ("Mashhad al-Hussein", a place where a drop of blood fell from the head of Imam Hussein). Since the 1950s, these shrines have been restored thanks to donations originating from foreign Shiite merchants, as well as beginning under the Shah, from the Iranian state.<sup>10</sup> Syria's alliance with Teheran following the Islamic Revolution entailed substantial Iranian investments in the rebuilding of some of these shrines in accordance with the canons of Persian architecture. The same occurred in places that were not traditional loci of Shiite worshipping. Starting from 1988, the Islamic Republic erected two massive mausoleums in the city of Raqqa, the site of the battle of Siffin, on the Euphrates.<sup>11</sup> In the vicinity of Damascus, a shrine was constructed in Dariya, starting from 1999, on the tomb of Sukayna, a daughter of Imam Ali, and Shiite clerics have taken control of the tomb of the Companion Hajar bin 'Uday al-Kindi in 'Adra. In Aleppo, Shiite institutions have displayed a growing interest in the purported tomb of Muhsin, the son of Imam Hussein, despite the fact that local Sunnis consider this burial place as that of a mere saint known as "Sheikh Muhsin".<sup>12</sup> These holy places have become the main stops of the tourist route that now attracts thousands of Shiite pilgrims, most of them Iranians, every year.<sup>13</sup>

The other main aspect of foreign Shiite presence in Syria is the development of a city of about 200,000 inhabitants around the mausoleum of Sayyida Zaynab, in the southern periphery of Damascus. This phenomenon results from the transformation of the site into a major Twelver learning centre, as well as from the settlement of Iraqi refugees fleeing persecution by Saddam Hussein's regime from the early 1980s onwards and the severe hardship imposed by the Western embargo in Iraq in the 1990s; since 2003, Shiite presence in the city has further increased as Iraqi refugees have sought to escape from sectarian violence in the country.

In the mid-1970s, Hasan al-Shirazi took advantage of his good relations with the Syrian authorities to open the first *hawza* (religious institute) in Sayyida Zaynab. In 1982, Ayatollah Khomeini imitated him, a move that was later followed by more than a dozen scholars from Iraq, Iran, and Lebanon.<sup>14</sup> The location proved highly successful as a teaching centre because of the weakening of Najaf as a result of Ba'thi repression, and, as far as Arabs were concerned, cultural proximity. Some scholars were also willing to escape Iranian tutelage, following the example of many Shirazis who left Qom in the late 1980s because of the deterioration of their previously excellent relations with the Islamic Republic.<sup>15</sup>

Whereas the *hawzāt* are mostly designed for foreign Shiite students (Iraqis, Lebanese, Gulfians, South Asians, Afghans),<sup>16</sup> other institutions also address a trans-sectarian Syrian audience, which has fed Sunnite anxiety about possible missionary projects. Since the 1990s, the Iranian cultural centre has convened regular conferences all over the country, distributed religious literature, and offered scholarships to the limited number of Sunnis who expressed the desire to study in Qom.<sup>17</sup> Al-Najma al-Muhammadiyah (“The Muhammadian Star”), an Iraqi Shiite association, has organized yearly inter-religious meetings since its creation in 1992.<sup>18</sup> However, the main source of Sunnite anxiety has been the activities of Iraqi clerics belonging to the Shiraziyya: not only because they enjoy a wide margin of manoeuvre as a result of the close ties they wove with the regime since the early 1970s, but also because their group, which has been focusing exclusively on religious revivalism since it relinquished its political ambitions in the late 1980s, is well-known for its aggressive missionary zeal. Shirazi mullahs took control of “Shiite” shrines in the country—and provided most of their staff—even before the Iranian state started to fund their development.<sup>19</sup> One of these mullahs, ‘Abd al-Hamid al-Muhajir, was allowed to present a programme on Syrian national television in the early 1990s.<sup>20</sup> In 2001, he opened the Syrian branch of the Committee for Service to the People of the House of the Prophet (*Hay’a khidma ahl al-bayt*), an organization whose self-avowed goal is to “spread the thought and culture of the People of the House all around the world”.<sup>21</sup>

Although Syrian Sunnis have always felt uncomfortable with the growth of Shiite institutions in their country, the latter process is not in itself a sufficient explanation for the level of sectarian distrust that was reached in the 2000s. For one century, indeed, the fluctuations of Sunnite-Shiite relations in Syria have always been tightly related to the broader political context.

*Sunnite-Shiite relations before the 2000s: the indelible traces of the Iranian “treason”*

During the first half of the twentieth century, Muslim reformism and Arab nationalism stressed the need for unity against Western colonialism, thus creating a favourable context for Sunnite-Shiite rapprochement.<sup>22</sup> Such was the background of Muhsin al-Amin’s effort to improve inter-communal relations in Damascus: he maintained good relations with reformist Sunnite scholars, hired a Sunnite muezzin for his school, and opposed the creation

of separate religious courts for Shiites.<sup>23</sup> Although tensions arose following the Saudi-Wahhabi conquest of the Hijaz in the mid-1920s,<sup>24</sup> Western imperialism was still fostering inter-sectarian synergies. In 1938, when the Salafi Sheikh Kamil al-Qassab convened the anti-colonial Congress of the Ulema in Damascus, he invited 'Abd al-Karim al-Zanjani, a Najafi scholar and champion of Islamic unity.<sup>25</sup> In its communiqué, the congress called to "unite the voice of the different Islamic schools of thought, which come together on the dogma of God's oneness, the ultimate goals of Islam, and the struggle against atheism."<sup>26</sup>

Despite the fact that their leader Mustafa al-Siba'i had been a disciple of Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib, a Cairo-based Syrian Salafi and one of the most influent anti-Shiite polemicists of the twentieth century,<sup>27</sup> the Syrian Muslim Brothers continued to show signs of opening towards Shiites after independence. Beside the new impetus given to Islamic ecumenism by the foundation in 1948 of the Azhar-sponsored Association for Rapprochement in Cairo,<sup>28</sup> the reason for this was a sense of solidarity with fellow Islamists sharing anti-imperialist and anti-secularist views. In 1955, the Syrian Brothers wholeheartedly welcomed Navvab-e Safavi, the leader of the Iranian movement Fada'iyan-e Islam, when he visited Damascus on his way back from the Islamic Congress of Jerusalem.<sup>29</sup> Al-Siba'i also introduced the study of Ja'fari law into the curriculum of the Faculty of shari'a he founded at the University of Damascus in 1954.<sup>30</sup> It is true that the Brothers' leader ended up deploring the lack of reciprocal efforts among his Twelver counterparts,<sup>31</sup> but it was politics, not doctrinal divergences, that eventually spoiled Sunnite-Shiite relations in Syria.

In the mid-1970s, the discontent provoked among Sunnite inhabitants of Sayyida Zaynab by the presence of Shirazi clerics forced the authorities to rein in the latter's activities for a while.<sup>32</sup> However, widespread anti-Shiite resentment had not taken root in the country yet. In the 1970s, Syrian Islamists were still reading books of the Iranian thinker Ali Shariati, and they enthusiastically welcomed the overthrow of the Shah as an "Islamic" rather than a "Shiite" revolution.<sup>33</sup> It is probably no accident that the wave of assassinations that had struck Syria since 1976 turned into a full-fledged insurgency in late 1979, that is, a few months after the birth of the Islamic Republic in Teheran. However, despite the fact that the Syrian Muslim Brothers had vowed support for his cause, Ayatollah Khomeini chose to side with the secular al-Asad, thus paving the way for a long-term strategic partnership.<sup>34</sup> As a result, the Islamic opposition had no choice but to seek



support from the Iraqi regime, which was itself at war with Iran. Teheran's "treason" also prompted several exiled Syrian Islamists to publish pamphlets denouncing both Shiite doctrines and Iranian expansionist ambitions.<sup>35</sup>

Inside Syria, the outcomes of the alliance with the Islamic Republic further strengthened Sunnite distrust. Indeed, the takeover and rebuilding of the shrines by Shiite actors generally occurred at the expense of local Sunnite inhabitants. In the late 1980s, for instance, the Iranian-funded rebuilding of the tomb of Sayyida Ruqqaya entailed the destruction of a block in the old Sunnite quarter of al-'Amara as well as the replacement of the local imam with a Shiite staff. Moreover, the mushrooming of Shiite *hawzāt* in Sayyida Zaynab has been seen by Sunnite clerics as a proof of the double standards applied by the regime, which has only allowed for the opening of a couple of Sunnite religious institutes since the 1970s. Finally, and as already mentioned, many Sunnite believe that Shiite institutions based in Syria actually serve missionary projects.

Such a tense context explains both the regime's encouragement for inter-sectarian dialogue and the reluctance of many Sunnite scholars to answer positively to this invitation. Indeed, the most frequent participants to Sunnite-Shiite public meetings are notoriously compliant religious leaders such as the late Grand Mufti Ahmad Kaftaru and his successor Ahmad Hassun. The unpopularity of such a stance is well illustrated by the case of Aleppo's Second Mufti Mahmud 'Akkam. A very popular preacher during the 1980s, he was later rejected by many of his admirers because of his avowed sympathy for Shiite Islam. In 1989, for instance, he led the "prayer of the absent" in memory of Ayatollah Khomeini, a gesture that was badly perceived in a city that has close cultural and economic ties with Iraq's Sunnite provinces.<sup>36</sup>

Anti-Shiism is thus no new phenomenon among Syrian Sunnis. However, it reached unprecedented levels in the 2000s as a result of the combination of increasingly visible Twelver activities in the country, on the one hand, and of the rise of sectarian tensions in the Middle East on the other.

### *The 2000s: Sunnite panic at the "Shiitization" of Syria*

In 2001, for the first time in modern Syrian history, a procession of chest-beating young men organized by the Shirazi Committee for Service to the People of the House went through the Old City of Damascus while singing hymns vowing to take revenge for the martyrdom of Imam Hussein.<sup>37</sup> This

martyrdom, as is well known, occurred at the hand of the Umayyad dynasty, whose mosque was located just next to the route of the procession. The repetition of similar events in the following years infuriated many Sunnis, not only because they perceived them as provocative, but also, once again, because of their feeling of discrimination, the authorities having banned most outdoor Sunni religious celebrations for four decades. In 2005, Sunni clerics and notables denounced the processions in a petition sent to President Bashar al-Asad, in vain.<sup>38</sup>

During the same period, there was a feeling in Syria that the expansion of Shiite infrastructures was getting a new impetus. The construction of the twin mausoleums of Raqqa had started in 1988, but it was only completed in 2004 due to several years of interruption. In Darya, the shrine of Sukayna bint Ali had been under construction since 1999. As will be shown below, the latter initiative aroused strong suspicions among Sunni religious leaders, who dismissed the very historical existence of Sukayna bint Ali as a Shiite invention and consequently interpreted the building of her mausoleum in a Sunni area as part of a strategy of progressive encroachment: a shrine attracts pilgrims, the presence of pilgrims entails the creation of shops selling religious literature and souvenirs, and Shiite influence inevitably spreads among the local population.

Of course, the arrival of hundreds of thousands of Iraqi refugees after the 2003 war played a major role in reinforcing the feeling of “invasion” by making Shiite religiosity more visible. This new potential audience also led to a surge of activity among Twelver institutions in Sayyida Zaynab. Indeed, the first half of the decade saw the multiplication of new *hawzāt* and revivalist committees founded by scholars wishing to emulate the Shirazis.<sup>39</sup> Here also, the contrast between the regime’s toleration of such organizations and the growing repression exerted against the non-violent Salafis—among other Sunni trends—was too obvious not to stir up Sunni anger. Nevertheless, the wave of anti-Shiism that struck Syria in the mid-2000s cannot be understood without taking into account the regional context.

After 2003, Syrian Sunnis witnessed the rise of Shiite and Iranian influence in Iraq with much anxiety, a sentiment that translated into genuine panic during the full-scale civil war that was ignited by the bombing of the mausoleum of Samarra in February 2006. Rumours referred to the foundation of “dozens of *husayniyyāt*” in Syria,<sup>40</sup> and to wide campaigns of proselytizing (*tabshīr*) targeting in particular the Sunni population of the Jezireh (East of the Euphrates), a predominantly rural area characterized by

widespread poverty and illiteracy.<sup>41</sup> The region is home to the village of Hatla, near Deir ez-Zor, where a community of a few thousand Shiites constitutes the only proven and significant case of collective conversion of Syrian Sunnis to Shiite Islam since the 1990s.<sup>42</sup> The same region is said to have been a primary target for the Ali Murtada Association of Jamil al-Asad, Hafiz's brother. This "political grouping behind a religious facade"<sup>43</sup> had been founded in 1981 in order to mobilize the Alawi community against the Islamic opposition. Thanks to its considerable financial and military means, it also reportedly managed to recruit a large number of Sunnite Arabs and Kurds from the Jezireh until it was banned in 1983.<sup>44</sup> Eastern Syria has also been a major exporter of labour to Lebanon, which resulted in several cases of conversion to Shiism.<sup>45</sup>

In the weeks that followed the Samarra bombing, prominent Sunnite Muslim scholars started to publicly denounce Shiite "intrigues" in their Friday sermons. In Aleppo, Sheikh Mahmud al-Husseini flayed the Imami institutions of Raqqa.<sup>46</sup> According to him, the latter's provocations were fuelling sectarian discord, thus opening the door to the bad winds coming from Iraq:

In two days, around two hundred mosques have been burnt in Iraq [...] the same phenomenon penetrates in our country, and I condemn it. [He raises his voice] I have received an invitation to attend the celebration of the battle of Siffin in Raqqa! [He yells] Siffin!! A symbol of war, of factionalism, of divergence!!! Sectarianism infiltrates from the East, but it seems that the security services—which pretend they are concerned about the unity of the country—do nothing to stop it!!!<sup>47</sup>

The next month, Sa'id Ramadan al-Buti, Syria's most renowned cleric and the main pillar of the regime's religious legitimization, alluded to the construction of the tomb of Sukayna bint Ali in Dariya and denounced it as a Trojan Horse:

They invent names of imaginary members of the Prophet's family, they build imaginary tombs thanks to the darkness of the night, and then they build them green cupolas. The goal of all this is to take over the surrounding areas. They turn these places into springboards for setting one sect against another, into springboards for conspiracy and discord.<sup>48</sup>

Al-Buti believed that the situation was sufficiently worrying to depart from his usual political cautiousness and openly expressed his discontent at the authorities' passivity: "maybe they are too busy with difficult circumstances that have plunged them into confusion". He also implicitly targeted

the policy of the Iranian state in Syria: “May God fight politics when it disregards principles; May God fight politics when it exploits religion to promote its interests.”<sup>49</sup>

In the following weeks, the issue of Iranian-backed proselytism in Syria emerged in the mainstream Arab media when, in an interview with a Kuwaiti newspaper, leading Syrian human rights activist and former member of the Muslim Brothers Haytham al-Malih referred to a “secret agreement” between the governments of Damascus and Teheran to “turn Syria from a Sunni to a Shiite society”.<sup>50</sup> Likewise, the anti-Syrian Lebanese magazine *al-Watan al-Arabi* talked of a “strategy of Shiitization” that had already resulted in thousands of conversions.<sup>51</sup>

At the same time, the promulgation of a decree imposing the closing down of Sunnite religious junior high schools reinforced the local ‘ulama’s sentiment of discrimination. In a petition against the decree that they sent to the president in June 2006, clergymen insisted on the fact that “the Shiite *hawzāt* deliberately disregard the circulars of the Ministry of Education”.<sup>52</sup> A few weeks earlier, indeed, the directors of the religious institutes of Sayyida Zaynab had refused with impunity to attend a meeting organized by state officials in order to discuss the legal and administrative situation of their schools, which in the absence of any legal recognition, were still operating on the basis of permits issued by the security apparatus.<sup>53</sup>

Even though it initially led to a rapprochement between the Sunnite clergy and the state, the war that broke out in July 2006 between Israel and the Syrian-backed Hizbullah eventually resulted in more tension. During the conflict, the distrust generated among the Sunnite ‘ulama by the pro-Iranian orientation of the Lebanese militia was counterbalanced by a genuine sense of the need for Muslim unity against Israel, by the threat of state repression, as well as by a will to stay in tune with a public opinion that immediately enthused at the military prowess of Hizbullah: in a largely spontaneous move, thousands of yellow Hizbullah flags and portraits of Hasan Nasrallah popped up in the country. Certain Friday preachers remained ambiguous—they denounced “Zionist barbarity” while not even mentioning Hizbullah in their sermons—<sup>54</sup> but leading clerics such as al-Buti and the elite of Aleppo’s ‘ulama openly condemned the “defeatist” fatwas issued by Saudi scholars who had forbidden any support to the Lebanese party considering the latter’s Imami creed. Al-Buti even claimed that these fatwas had been “fabricated” in the United States.<sup>55</sup> Sunnite Islamic charities also played a leading role in helping the thousands of Lebanese

refugees—many of them Shiites—who flooded Damascus during the summer. The regime was thus indebted to the religious elite, which possibly explains the decision not to implement the projected closure of the religious junior high schools at the start of the new school year.

Although Hizbullah's "Divine Victory" was widely acclaimed by the Syrian population, the prestige won by the Lebanese militia quickly waned as a result of renewed rumours of Iranian-backed proselytism, which peaked during the autumn of 2006. Once again, Sunnite fears were fuelled by a combination of facts and propaganda. As far as facts are concerned, admiration for Hizbullah's military performances sometimes translated into a more strictly religious interest in Shiism. In October 2006, while visiting a young committed Sunni of Aleppo, I found a video CD containing a hymn in honour of Imam Ali sung by Iraqi Shiite artist Basim al-Karbala'i, with the mausoleum of Najaf as visual background. When asked about the place where he had bought this CD, my informant told me to go to Bab al-Faraj, a quarter of downtown Aleppo where all kinds of videos are sold, from Friday sermons to erotic movies. By way of advertisement, shopkeepers usually display the novelties on a TV overlooking the pavement. One of them was showing al-Karbala'i's videos, which were proving highly successful since I saw several of them being sold in about fifteen minutes—all of this in a city that is not home to any sizeable Twelver or Alawite community. Of course, such a popular interest in Shiite Islam did not amount to conversion—my informant, at least, never renounced his Sunnite faith—but it was sufficient to spread panic among circles that were already afraid of Shiite "invasion". It was also, above all, a piece of good fortune for those who had political interests in feeding the phobia.

The July war, indeed, was immediately followed by an unprecedented propaganda campaign denouncing Shiite missionary efforts in Syria and the Arab world at large. This campaign was launched by the rivals of the Syrian-Iranian-Hizbullah axis—i.e. the Syrian exiled opposition, the anti-Syrian Lebanese parties, and the main allies of the US in the Arab East (Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan)—which were strongly dissatisfied with the outcome of the war. Its heroic resistance to the Israeli offensive had considerably strengthened Hizbullah—which now felt confident enough to push for the fall of Fu'ad Siniora's anti-Syrian government—and its sponsoring states, whereas it dealt a symbolic blow to "moderate" Arab regimes. Syria's benefits were also obvious in the realm of diplomacy: Western consensus about the necessity to isolate the country started to crack during the war, Spanish

Foreign Minister Miguel Angel Moratinos being the first member of a European government to visit Syria since the assassination of Rafiq al-Hariri in February 2005.<sup>56</sup>

For those who were afraid of a reinvigorated al-Asad, a rhetoric counter-offensive focusing on Iranian proselytism was not only a way to convince the targeted audience that the Alawite ruling elite was detrimental to the predominantly Sunnite identity of Syria: it was also aimed at depriving the Ba'athist regime from its claimed Arab nationalist legitimacy, since Shiitization, anti-Syrian polemicists claimed, was tantamount to the "Iranization" or "Persanization" of Syria.<sup>57</sup>

In previous years, the Muslim Brothers had avoided engaging in sectarian controversies, probably in order not to antagonize potential partners among the secular opposition. Starting from early September 2006, however, they released scores of alarmist articles that sometimes drew upon the crudest versions of conspiracy theory.<sup>58</sup> The Iranians, who were occasionally called "Safavids",<sup>59</sup> were not only accused of spreading the Twelver creed in the Syrian steppe by giving USD 10,000 to each recent convert, but also of trying to "modify the country's demography" through the naturalization of thousands of their nationals.<sup>60</sup>

This time, rumours of Shiitization were not only echoed by the local clergy (Wahba al-Zuhayli, Syria's most famous specialist of Islamic law, denounced a "movement led by the Iranian embassy")<sup>61</sup> but also by Western newspapers,<sup>62</sup> by the king of Saudi Arabia,<sup>63</sup> as well as by two of the world's most influential Sunnite clerics, namely, the head of the World Union of Muslim Scholars Yusuf al-Qaradawi,<sup>64</sup> and former Saudi opponent Salman al-'Awda.<sup>65</sup> A Syrian MP and the Minister of Culture even had to publicly deny rumours that the Grand Mufti Hassun had embraced Shiite Islam.<sup>66</sup> In the first weeks of 2007, the situation further deteriorated following the execution of Saddam Hussein at the hand of Shiite militiamen, on the one hand, and deadly sectarian skirmishes in Beirut, on the other. Discourses radicalized throughout 2007: Mufti of Mount Lebanon Ali Juzu, an ardent supporter of the Siniora government, spoke of Damascus as "the gateway of Persian colonialism",<sup>67</sup> while the Syrian Muslim Brothers described the military agreement signed by Damascus and Teheran in June 2006 as tantamount to "the occupation of Syria by Iran".<sup>68</sup> Like all Arab viewers of satellite TV channels, Syrians were also exposed to increasingly heated debates between representatives of the two sects, as well as openly anti-

Shiite programmes such as that presented on al-Safa TV by 'Adnan al-'Ar'ur, a Syrian Salafi polemicist based in Ryad.

In order to contain the flames, liegemen of the regime among Sunnite and Shiite clerics denied the "false rumours" of Shiitization on pan-Arab televisions.<sup>69</sup> In November 2006, the Association for Fraternity between the Islamic Schools of Law was jointly founded by Salah al-Din Kaftaru, the son of the late Grand Mufti Ahmad Kaftaru and the director of the academy that was named after him,<sup>70</sup> and Abdallah Nidham, the head of the Twelver association al-Muhsiniyya.<sup>71</sup> Since 2004, that is, since the invasion of Iraq, the Kaftaru Academy has organized a yearly Sunnite-Shiite congress. In 2007, it welcomed no less than three of such meetings, which were held in the presence of Syria's chief allies among Lebanese Sunnite Islamists, namely, prominent thinker Fathi Yakan and representatives of the al-Tawhid movement.<sup>72</sup> That year, the academy was also the venue for the founding congress of the Society of the Ulema of Iraq, a bi-sectarian organization aimed at fighting the foreign occupation of the country.<sup>73</sup>

The goodwill displayed by the representatives of official Islam towards the regime's promotion of "Islamic unity" should not hide the fact that all Syrian Sunnite clerics were worried about Shiite proselytizing, which they perceived as an existential threat to their communal identity. For instance, even though Salah al-Din Kaftaru was actively involved in Sunnite-Shiite dialogue, his "private" criticisms of Iranian missionary activities were an open secret. He was eventually arrested in July 2009, a decision the security services justified by, among other things, Kaftaru's verbal "attacks against other religious communities".<sup>74</sup> Even Islamist MP Muhammad Habash, who is well known for his very open approach to inter-faith relations, asked the Iranian vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs Manushehr Muhammadi for official clarifications on that issue during a public meeting held in Damascus.<sup>75</sup> As for Sa'id Ramadan al-Buti, whose open denunciation of Shiite "scheming" has already been mentioned, he seemingly exploited the regime's need for his moral authority in this difficult period in order to extract some concessions. In January 2007, in his weekly programme on national television, the scholar described the circumstances of Saddam Hussein's execution as being the result of an American-Zionist conspiracy aimed at dividing the Muslims. In order to thwart this plan, he concluded, Sunnis and Shiites should form "not merely a tactical, but a strategic" alliance against Israel.<sup>76</sup> It is probably not a coincidence that, on the very same day, the government withdrew the permit of the Association for Social Initiative,

a feminist organization which al-Buti had violently criticized for its lobbying in favour of a secular reform of the law on personal status.<sup>77</sup>

Being perceived as a threat to the very existence of the Sunnite community, Shiite proselytizing has also been the only issue that evenly worried all categories of Syrian Islamic actors during the past decade. Indeed, whereas clerics generally concentrated on sectoral objectives such as the struggle against feminism and the defence of religious schools, lay activists and reformist intellectuals embraced a democratic agenda. All of them agreed, however, on castigating the Shiite “invasion”. As we have already seen, the first Syrian personality to talk about Shiitization in foreign media was the human rights activist Haytham al-Malih. Likewise, the reformist intellectual ‘Imad al-Din al-Rachid denounced the founding of “dozens of *husayniyyāt*” in the country on al-Jazeera TV.<sup>78</sup> Moreover, the Movement for Justice and Development, an AKP-inspired party created in London in 2006, sponsored the authors of *The Shiite Renaissance in Syria*, which remains the most detailed report on Imami missionary activities in the country.<sup>79</sup> This report aimed at invalidating what it presented as the emollient results of another study released in 2006 by secular intellectuals.<sup>80</sup> Whereas, according to the latter, Shiitization only concerned a handful of families and was not promoted by any actual missionary efforts, the authors of *The Shiite Renaissance* asserted that 8,000 Syrian Sunnis (three-quarters of them from the Jezireh) had converted to Twelver Islam between 1999 and 2007.<sup>81</sup>

Rumours of Shiitization decreased somewhat since 2008, partly as a result of the regime’s compliance with the Sunnite ‘ulama’s demand to obtain the replacement of Iranian ambassador Hassan Ikhtari, a cleric who was widely considered to be the mastermind of Shiite missionary activities in Syria.<sup>82</sup> The main factor that calmed the situation, however, was the diminution of sectarian tensions in the Middle East due to the relative improvement of the situation in Iraq and Lebanon.

### *Conclusion*

Shiite Islam has become increasingly visible in Syria during the twentieth century due to the revival of the local Imami community, the rapprochement between the Alawite sect and Twelver Islam, the influx of Iraqi refugees, and the alliance between the Ba‘thist regime and the Islamic Republic of Iran. The multiplication of Shiite shrines and religious schools that has



been witnessed since the 1970s has provoked widespread discontent among the local Sunnis. Indeed, the latter have resented the takeover (or, in some cases, perceived blatant invention) of holy sites by Twelver clerics, have jealously watched the regime grant foreign Shiites a freedom of action it denies to Syrian Sunnis, and have become increasingly convinced that they are the target of Iranian-backed missionary projects.

Although such sentiments were already well entrenched in the late twentieth century, Syrian opponents explain the unprecedented panic at Shiitization witnessed in the mid-2000s by pointing to a significant increase in Twelver activities that resulted in a growing number of conversions. This shift, they claim, resulted from both the deepening of the Syrian-Iranian partnership and from Bashar al-Asad's pronounced goodwill towards Shiite missionaries. Such a narrative is questionable in several respects. Of course, there is little doubt that many of the Imami clerics who officiate in the country wish to win Sunnis over and, in the case of the Shirazis in particular, hardly conceal their intention to do so. However, to date, there is no indisputable proof of a large-scale phenomenon of conversion among Syrian Sunnis. As for the idea that a policy shift on the part of the regime occurred during the past decade, it must be seriously qualified. It is true that Shiite *hawzāt* and committees multiplied at that time—probably as a result of massive Iraqi immigration—and it is also true that Twelver “provocations” reached a new level with the processions that were organized in Damascus from 2001 onwards. At the same time, the circumstances of the construction of the mausoleum of Sayyida Ruqqaya, in the late 1980s, or the “invention” of the tomb of Sukayna bint Ali, in 1999, show that Hafiz al-Asad was not really more worried about the sensitivity of his Sunnite subjects than his son Bashar. Finally, seeing Shiite activities in Syria as tantamount to Iranian influence is not entirely accurate either. Indeed, the most active Twelver trend in Syria is the Iraqi Shiraziyya, whose ties to the Syrian regime preceded the latter's alliance with Teheran. Although they probably coordinate their action in Syria with Iranian institutions, the Shirazis also rely on their long-standing and intimate relationship with the Alawite community, and, consequently, with the security apparatus, in order to fulfil their own missionary agenda.

In any case, explaining the intensity of anti-Shiite sentiments among Syrian Sunnis in the mid-2000s requires taking regional developments into account. Since the 1980s, Shiite presence in the country was all the more badly perceived because it was associated with Iran, one of the very few

states that had chosen to support al-Asad in his war against the Islamic opposition. After 2003, the same state was seen as encouraging its Iraqi clients to cooperate with the Western invaders. From then on, the curve of anti-Shiism in Syria has closely followed regional developments, rather than any purported intensification of missionary efforts in the country: a first peak was observed in the spring of 2006, that is, right after the start of the full-scale civil war in Iraq; in the following summer, tension decreased because of widespread admiration for Hezbollah's facing up to Israel; for this very reason, however, rivals of the Syrian-Iranian axis launched an unprecedented campaign of propaganda, which provoked hysteria among Sunnis all over the Middle East during the autumn of 2006; this trend reached its apex after the execution of Saddam Hussein in January 2007; and logically, tensions started to decrease in 2008 with the end of the most severe phases of the Iraqi and Lebanese crises.

The Shiite presence in Syria will probably remain a factor of tensions, all the more so given that the government does not seem willing or able to curb Twelver initiatives in the country: in July 2009, an official permit was granted for the building of a new mausoleum near the city of Raqqa.<sup>83</sup> Warnings formulated by prominent religious figures did not stop either: in March 2010, 'A'id al-Qarni, a former Saudi opponent and one of the most popular Islamic writers of the last decade, spoke of Iran's "gigantic efforts" to Shiitize Syria.<sup>84</sup> At the same time, the Syrian mobile phone operator MTN deactivated the service allowing its clients to send SMS to the Salafi satellite channel al-Wisal because of the latter's anti-Shiite stance.<sup>85</sup> These developments, however, were not enough to reawaken the panic that took hold of Syrian Sunnis four years ago. In order to reappear, such a panic will probably have to wait for another major episode of sectarian strife in the Middle East.

21. *Al-Usbuiyya*, 14 December 2010.
  22. NINA news agency, 30 January 2011.
  23. *Al-Akhbar*, 15 November 2010.
  24. See for example, “Iraqi Sunni Lands Show New Gas and Oil Promise”, *The New York Times*, 19 February 2007.
  25. Reidar Visser, “The Akkaz Revolt: A Test Case for Iraq, and for Iraqiyya”, gulf-analysis.wordpress.com, 20 October 2010.
  26. *Al-Arab* (Doha), 21 October 2010.
  27. Al-Iraqnews.net, 20 October 2010.
  28. Reidar Visser, *Shiite Separatism in Iraq: Cyberspace Reverie or Real Constitutional Challenge?*, Oslo: NUPI, 2005.
  29. Fishman, *Fourth Generation Governance*.
  30. Said Amir Arjomand, *Authority and Political Culture in Shiism*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988.
  31. For the endurance of Iraq as a territorial framework despite competing nationalist visions, see Fanar Haddad, *Sectarianism in Iraq: Antagonistic Visions of Unity*, London: Hurst, 2011.
6. KARBALA IN THE Umayyad Mosque: SUNNITE PANIC  
AT THE “SHIITIZATION” OF SYRIA IN THE 2000s
1. Observation by the author.
  2. In this chapter, “Shiite Islam” strictly designates Twelver-Imami-Ja‘fari Islam, to the exclusion of the Alawite, Ismaili, and Druze faiths.
  3. For a well-documented example of this narrative, see *Al-ba‘th al-shi‘i fi Suriyya* [The Shiite Renaissance in Syria] 1919–2007, s.l., 2008, p. 17, <http://www.medi-afire.com/?nmkdjmm3mzm> (Accessed 13 April 2010).
  4. See the contribution of Legrain in this volume.
  5. *Al-ba‘th al-shi‘i*, p. 12.
  6. Sabrina Mervin, *Un réformisme chiite: ulémas et lettrés du Jabal ‘Amil (actuel Liban-Sud) de la fin de l’Empire ottoman à l’indépendance du Liban*, Paris: Karthala, 2000, pp. 163–77.
  7. On this rapprochement, see Martin Kramer, “Syria’s Alawis and Shi‘ism” in M. Kramer (ed.), *Shi‘ism, Resistance, and Revolution*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1987, pp. 237–54; Sabrina Mervin, “Quelques jalons pour une histoire du rapprochement (*taqrīb*) des alaouites vers le chiïsme” in R. Brunner (ed.), *Islamstudien ohne Ende, Festschrift für Werner Ende*, Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2002, pp. 281–8; Kais Firro, “The ‘Alawis in Modern Syria: From Nusayriya to Islam via ‘Alawiya”, *Der Islam*, 82, 1, 2005, pp. 1–31; *al-ba‘th al-shi‘i*, pp. 33–46.
  8. See Falih ‘Abd al-Jabbar, *The Shiite movement in Iraq*, London: Saqi, 2003, pp. 216–22; Laurence Louër, *Transnational Shia Politics: Religious and Political Networks in the Gulf*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2008, pp. 88–99.

9. *Al-ba'th al-shi'i*, pp. 42–4.
10. Sabrina Mervin, “Sayyida Zaynab, Banlieue de Damas ou nouvelle ville sainte chiite?”, *CEMOTI*, 22, 1996, p. 150; *Office Arabe d'Information* (reports consulted at the IFPO, Damascus), 714–5, V, 16–9, 20–22 April 1955 and 955, V, 5–8 October 1957.
11. Myriam Ababsa, “The Shi'i Mausoleums of Raqqa: Iranian Proselytism and Local Significations” in F. Lawson (ed.), *Demystifying Syria*, London: Saqi, 2009, pp. 85–104.
12. *Al-ba'th al-shi'i*, pp. 63–5.
13. In 2008, 361,000 Iranians entered Syrian territory (Central Bureau of Statistics, *Statistical Yearbook*, Damascus: CBS, 2009, p. 229). On these pilgrimages, see Ababsa, “The Shi'i Mausoleums”, pp. 88–92; Paulo Pinto, “Pilgrimage, Commodities, and Religious Objectification: The Making of Transnational Shiism between Iran and Syria”, *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 1, 2007, pp. 109–25.
14. Mervin, “Sayyida Zaynab”; *Al-ba'th al-shi'i*, p. 98.
15. Despite the fact that its main spiritual leaders still reside in Iran, the Shiraziyya has become increasingly autonomous during the last two decades. In the Gulf monarchies, Shirazis even define their political identity by stressing their loyalty to their respective homelands, as opposed to the posture of their pro-Iranian rivals. Louër, *Transnational Shia Politics*, pp. 197–8; 225 ff.
16. According to the Syrian authorities, there were two hundred Syrian students in Sayyida Zaynab in 2006 (*Al-ba'th al-shi'i*, p. 106).
17. On Iranian cultural diplomacy in Syria, see Nadia Von Maltzahn, “The Case of Iranian Cultural Diplomacy in Syria”, *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication*, 2, 2009, pp. 33–50.
18. See its website: <http://al-najma.org/home/> (Accessed 4 April 2010).
19. *Al-ba'th al-shi'i*, pp. 79–80.
20. Ibid. p. 52.
21. Ibid. p. 77.
22. See Rainer Brunner, *Islamic Ecumenism in the 20th Century: the Azhar and Shiism between Rapprochement and Restraint*, Leiden: Brill, 2004.
23. Mervin, *Un réformisme chiite*, pp. 170–6.
24. Ibid.
25. On al-Zanjani, see Brunner, *Islamic Ecumenism*, pp. 113 sq.
26. “Bayān mu'tamar al-'ulamā' al-awwal al-mun'aqad bi-Dimashq 11–13 rajab 1357 [Communiqué of the First Congress of the 'Ulama held in Damascus from 6 to 8 September 1938]”, in *Rabita 'Ulama al-Sham*, 1 May 2006, <http://www.islamsyria.com/Details.php?QType=1&Id=6> (Accessed 1 August 2009).
27. See Werner Ende, “Sunni Polemical Writings on the Shi'a and the Iranian Revolution” in D. Menashri (ed.), *The Iranian Revolution and the Muslim World*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1990, pp. 219–32.

28. Brunner, *Islamic Ecumenism*.
29. *Al-mujāhid al-sāmit, al-shaykh Muhammad al-Ashmar* [The Silent Fighter, Sheikh Muhammad al-Ashmar], Beirut, 2002. p. 77.
30. Bernard Botiveau, “La formation des oulémas en Syrie. La faculté de Shari’a de l’Université de Damas” in G. Delanoue (ed.), *Les intellectuels et le pouvoir: Syrie, Égypte, Tunisie, Algérie*, Cairo: CEDEJ, 1986, pp. 71–2.
31. ‘Adnan Zarzur, *Mustafa al-Siba’i. Al-dā’iyyat al-mujaddid* [Mustafa al-Siba’i. The Preacher and Renovator], Damascus: Dar al-Qalam, 2000, p. 360.
32. *Al-ba’th al-shi’i*, pp. 77–9.
33. Ahmad Mu’adh al-Khatib, “Ghufrānuka Allahum fa-l-Husayn lā yashrab al-dimā” [Your Pardon, O God, al-Hussein does not drink blood], *Darbuna*, 3 January 2007, <http://www.darbuna.net/archive/text.php?CID=9&ID=416> (Accessed 2 August 2009).
34. Umar Abdallah, *The Islamic Struggle in Syria*, Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1983, pp. 186–7.
35. Ende, “Sunni Polemical Writings”, p. 226; Guido Steinberg, “Jihadi-Salafism and the Shi’is” in R. Meijer (ed.), *Global Salafism. Islam’s New Religious Movement*, London: Hurst, 2009, pp. 118–21.
36. *Al-ba’th al-shi’i*, p. 56.
37. Ibid. p. 81.
38. *Akhbar al-Sharq*, 27 April 2005 (dead link).
39. *Al-ba’th al-shi’i*, p. 83.
40. Ibid. pp. 76–7; 93.
41. The first writing on this issue was published in 2004 by a Salafi (‘Abd al-Sittir Al Hussein), *Tahdhīr al-barriyya min nashāt al-shi’a fi Suriyya* [Warning to the People of the Desert against the Activities of the Shiites in Syria], s.l., 2004.
42. *Al-ba’th al-shi’i*, pp. 141–2.
43. Nikolaos Van Dam, *The Struggle for Power in Syria: Politics and Society under Asad and the Ba’th Party*, London: I. B. Tauris, 1996, p. 122.
44. Ibid. pp. 122–3; *Al-ba’th al-shi’i*, pp. 29–33.
45. *Al-ba’th al-shi’i*, p. 53.
46. For background information and bibliography on the Syrian Sunnite clergy, see Thomas Pierret, “Sunni Clergy Politics in the Cities of Ba’thi Syria” in F. Lawson (ed.), *Demystifying Syria*, London: Saqi, 2009, pp. 70–84.
47. Friday sermon of 10 March 2006 (observation by the author).
48. Sa’id Ramadan al-Buti, “Friday sermon of 28 April 2006”, *Personal website*, <http://www.bouti.com/article.php?PHPSESSID=c8cefb70281053937fe7e7654379d082&id=244> (Accessed 4 August 2009).
49. Ibid.
50. *Al-Ra’i al-Amm*, 1 May 2006.
51. *Al-Watan al-Arabi*, 12 June 2006.

52. *Akhbar al-Sharq*, 30 June 2006 (dead link).
53. *Al-ba'th al-shi'i*, pp. 98–107.
54. Observations by the author, Damascus, July 2006.
55. *Al-Thawra*, 18 August 2006.
56. *Al-Hayat*, 2 August 2006.
57. See for instance Amir Taheri, “The Iranization of Syria”, *Jerusalem Post*, 2 November 2006.
58. See for instance *Akhbar al-Sharq* (newsletter of the Syrian Muslim Brothers), 1 September, 8 October, and 12 November 2006; Khalid al-Ahmad, “Al-sharq al-awsat al-irānī” [The Iranian Middle East], *Website of the Syrian Muslim Brothers*, 2 September 2006 (dead links).
59. Khalid al-Ahmad, “Bashar yubī‘ Suriyya li-l-safawiyyīn” [Bashar sells Syria to the Safavids], *Rabita ‘Ulama al-Sham*, 18 November 2006, <http://www.oda-basham.net/show.php?sid=9230> (Accessed 4 August 2009). “Safavid” is a term commonly used by Sunnite anti-Iranian polemicists. It refers to the Safavid dynasty, which ruled Iran from 1501 to 1722 and imposed Shiism as the state religion.
60. *Akhbar al-Sharq*, 27 October 2006 (dead link). These accusations are uncritically presented as facts by Khalid Sindawi, “The Zaynabiyya Hawza in Damascus and its Role in Shi’ite Religious Instruction”, *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 45, no. 6, 2009, pp. 864–5.
61. *Akhbar al-Sharq*, 31 October 2006 (dead link).
62. *The Washington Post*, 6 October 2006; *Christian Science Monitor*, 16 February 2007; *New York Times Magazine*, 29 April 2007.
63. *Time Magazine*, 22 February 2007.
64. *Al-Hayat*, 3 September 2006.
65. *Akhbar al-Sharq*, 26 October 2006 (dead link). See also the article published by the famous Syrian Salafi exile and long-standing anti-Shiite polemicist Muhammad Surur Zayn al-‘Abidin: “Al-tashayyu‘ fi Suriyya—Muhāfadha Dar‘a” [Shiitization in Syria—The governorate of Daraa], *Personal website*, 28 October 2006, <http://www.surour.net/index.php?group=view&rid=762> (Accessed 4 April 2010).
66. *Al-Arabiyya.net*, 6 November 2006, <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2006/11/06/28855.html> (Accessed 4 August 2009); *Al-Ittihad*, 16 January 2007.
67. *L'Orient-Le Jour*, 8 June 2007.
68. *Al-Watan al-Arabi*, 13 November 2007.
69. *Al-Arabiyya TV*, 27 November 2006 and 12 March 2007; *al-Jazeera.net*, 25 February 2007, <http://www.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/31A743FD-DB83-4F43-9130-FCDEA8ACDEDA.htm> (Accessed 4 August 2009).
70. The Kaftaro Academy is the largest private Islamic school in Syria. It has enjoyed strong state support since its creation in 1982.

71. *All4Syria*, 19 November 2006, <http://www.all4syria.biz/index.html/printme.php?id=2693> (Accessed 5 September 2009).
72. *SANA*, 27 July 2007, <http://www.almotamar.net/47119.htm> (Accessed 5 August 2009).
73. *Al-Ra'i*, 19 May 2007.
74. *All4syria*, 8 July 2009, <http://all4syria.info/content/view/11194/113/> (Accessed 10 July 2009).
75. *Al-Hayat*, 25 February 2007.
76. “Dirāsāt Qur’āniyya” [Koranic Studies], *Syrian National Television*, 10 January 2007.
77. *Akhbar al-Sharq*, 11 January 2007 (dead link).
78. *Al-Jazeera*, 9 February 2007.
79. Ibid.
80. *Amaliyyat al-tashayyu‘ fī Sūriyya 1985–2006: Dirāsa ijtimā’iyya—ihsā’iyya* [The Process of Shiitization in Syria, 1985–2006: a Sociological and Statistical Study], s.l., 2006.
81. *Al-ba’th al-shi‘i*, pp. 126–7.
82. *ADN Kronos International*, 3 January 2008.
83. *All4Syria*, 4 July 2009, <http://all4syria.info/content/view/11070/113/> (Accessed 14 September 2009).
84. *Mirsad Suriyya*, 3 March 2010, <http://www.syriahr.com/9–3–2010-syrian%20observatory12.htm> (Accessed 5 March 2010).
85. *All4Syria*, 23 May 2010, <http://all4syria.info/content/view/26667/113/> (Accessed 2 August 2010).

## 7. THE STRUGGLE FOR CITIZENSHIP OF THE SHIITES OF SAUDI ARABIA

1. Toby Jones, “Saudi Arabia’s not so New Anti-Shi‘ism”, *Middle East Report*, vol. 37, no. 1, 2007, p. 29; Maximillian Terhalle, “Are the Shia Rising?”, *Middle East Policy*, vol. 14, no. 2, 2007, p. 69.
2. Stéphane Lacroix, “Between Islamist and Liberals: Saudi Arabia’s New ‘Islam Liberal’ Reformists”, *Middle East Journal*, vol. 58, no. 3 (summer 2004), pp. 356–8.
3. Fouad Ibrahim, *The Shi‘is of Saudi Arabia*, London & San Francisco: Saqi Books, 2006.
4. Ibid. pp. 17–8; International Crisis Group (ICG), *The Shiite Question in Saudi Arabia*, *Middle East Report* no. 45, 19 September 2005, p. 1; Toby Jones, “The Iraq Effect in Saudi Arabia”, *Middle East Report*, vol. 35, no. 4, 2005, p. 21. The relative number of Shiites in Saudi Arabia seems quite stable, judging from older estimates. See Jacob Goldberg, “The Shi‘i Minority in Saudi Arabia” in Juan R. I. Cole & Nikki R. Keddie (eds), *Shi‘ism and Social Protest*, New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1986, p. 230.